

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 211: STEPHEN M.R. COVEY

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast, where we provide strategies and tools for climbing the S curve of Learning™ in your professional and personal life, disrupting who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be.

I'm your host, Whitney Johnson.

There is a wonderful scene in the Crown where Winston Churchill has hidden from Queen Elizabeth his ailing health. He's had two strokes, but asks his people to say it's just a cold. When Queen Elizabeth discovers the truth, she hauls him into her office and tells him that withholding this information is a betrayal. She says these institutions, referring to the monarchy and the government, only work when they support each other, when they trust one another.

That's what we're talking about today, trust. Here with us to talk about trust is Stephen M. R. Covey, New York Times, a number one Wall Street Journal best-selling author of *The Speed of Trust*, which has been translated into 22 languages and sold over two million copies worldwide.

**Whitney Johnson:** Stephen, welcome.

**Stephen Covey:** Thank you, Whitney. I'm delighted to be here with you. Very excited.

**Whitney Johnson:** Very first question for you is I'd be really curious, as you think about yourself as a leader and running a company, what are one or two formative experiences that really made you who you are as a leader?

**Stephen Covey:** Yeah, well, I could actually go back to when I was just a young boy and an experience with my father, Dr. Stephen R. Covey, who wrote *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and in that he tells the story of trying to teach his son how to take care of the lawn, the yard. He called it green and clean. And really, it was a transformative experience for me at a very young age because of how it made me feel. It was giving out responsibilities to the kids in the family and I volunteered to take care of the land. And this is in the days before automatic sprinklers. So, you had to go out and manually turn them on and we had this big lawn and all this grass and he trained me over a two week period. I was only six years old, by the way, on this, Whitney, so, so young. And he trained me and he said, "We just have one clear goal in mind. We want the lawn to be green and clean." And he

said, "Green is the color of our neighbor's yard," because ours was kind of yellow. And then here's what clean looks like in over a two week period. He trained me. He told me how I achieved it was up to me that if I wanted to, I could turn on the hose or I could use buckets or turn on the sprinklers, you know, but I was responsible for the result, green and clean.

And then he said, "Once a week we'll walk around the yard together. You'll tell me how we're doing. And I'm your helper if I have time." So, It was a two week process, he trained me and he turned it over to me and I did nothing. And it was in the middle of the summer and the scorching heat in the lawn was yellowing by the day. And he was a Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Nothing, nothing, nothing. And the lawn literally was withering in front of his eyes. And he said that he just wanted to take the job right back from me, thinking, you know, "He's just too young." But he kind of stayed with it and said, "Hey, son, why don't we walk around the yard like we agreed to, we do once a week and you can tell me how it's going." So we began to walk around. The yard was anything but green. It was yellow and even browning, and it was cluttered, anything but clean. We had a family barbecue over the weekend. There's garbage strewn everywhere. And I just knew I hadn't done the job. And I began to break down and cry and I said, "Well, Dad, this is just so hard," you know? And he said, "Well, what's hard? You haven't done one thing." But what was hard was me as a young boy just kind of learning to take responsibility to take ownership for this.

He said, "Would like me to help you?" And I said, "Would you?" He said, "I told you I would if I had time." I said, "Do you have time?" He said, "I've got time." So, I ran into the house and I got two garbage bags and I came out and I gave one to him and I said, "Dad, would you go over and pick up that garbage over there? Because it makes me want to vomit." So he followed my lead and he went over and did what I asked him to do. And it was at that moment that I began to realize and recognize that this is my job. I'm responsible and my dad is responding to my direction. He's actually doing what I'm asking him to do. And so from that moment, I began to take responsibility for that yard and I only asked my dad for help a couple more times the rest of the summer. But from that day forward, the lawn was green and it was clean. I felt my father trusted me and I didn't want to let him down. I was too young to be worried about allowance or status, but I didn't want to let my dad down. And I responded to the trash and I rose to the occasion and I took responsibility. And as I reflect back on that, I realized that that kind of affirmation in me of having someone believe in me, seeing my potential and extending trust to me, helping me develop and see it, and then not pulling back the trash when I didn't come through, but staying with it and then me kind of learning and, and then responding and rising to the occasion and performing and then taking responsibility and being proud of the yard and making sure my brothers and sisters stayed off it to make sure they didn't mess it up.

And, you know, just taking this responsibility, I kind of look back on that and say, "While I was young, it kind of imprinted in my mind and in my heart, probably more than anything, that the power of being trusted." Because what I remember is how I felt and how I felt trusted, and I thought about that countless times as I have then transitioned into other roles of leadership, of just that simple example of a father extending trust to a six year old and if a six year old can be trusted then maybe aa 26 or 36 or 66 year olds can be trusted, you know. So that idea, that simple little personal family experience had a profound impact on me. And I learned from my father the power of extending trust and of being trusted and what it does to people, how it changes them, how it inspires them, how it brings out the very best in them.

**Whitney Johnson:** So I have to ask this. Did you do something similar with your children when they were six years old?

**Stephen Covey:** I did. Well, we didn't until they were about eight.

**Whitney Johnson:** They were eight. All right.

**Stephen Covey:** I waited a little longer thinking that maybe that maybe I'd give them a little bit of a runway. But, yeah, I pass that on to my kids and they've all taken the responsibility at different times. It's easier today because we have automatic sprinklers, but still, they take responsibility for mowing the lawn and keeping it green and clean.

**Whitney Johnson:** When I hear you tell that story and thinking of it as a parent, I reflect on how excruciating that must have been for your father to extend that trust.

**Stephen Covey:** It was especially when he was wondering, "Is he just too young? You know, if I started too early, is he not ready for this? Am I setting him up to fail?" And he told me that he wanted to just take the job back many times, especially when the lawn was dying, but he stayed with it.

**Whitney Johnson:** What's a formative, possibly crucible experience that led you to think even more about the idea of trust and the importance of it?

**Stephen Covey:** So while it was imprinted in my mind and implanted in my heart from a young age, it wasn't really until I had a crucible-type experience when I, you know, I'd been the CEO of Covey Leadership Center, my father's company that he established and, and I helped try to build that. And we're having some great success. And we started operating in about 40 countries and really build a brand and a reputation and we're growing. The business became very profitable, these types of things, all good measures. And then we made the decision that we would merge with our arch competitor, our nemesis at the Franklin Quest organization. We'd both gone heavy into time management. We'd gone into time management, they were into time management. They were the bigger player, more established. And and they were a publicly traded company. We merged companies with these two arch competitors coming together. And I'll tell you what, it was quite a bit messy at first because merging companies, content companies, they have a methodology, a dogma, if you will, is kind of like merging religions. I mean, people are just very clear about their approach and their format, their methodology. And it was very challenging. We kind of knew it would be, but it was probably 10x what we thought. And so suddenly we were really kind of slowed down by the distrust that entered everywhere. Every decision was seemingly politicized. Every action was seen through the lens of, "Is this a Covey person? Is this a Franklin person? Who's making this decision? What's their criteria?" And we all got tarnished by it and I got tarnished by it, too.

I'd been the CEO of Covey Leadership Center. Now we're merging and I'm taking responsibility for the education and training business. And half the people didn't trust me. And it wasn't that I had done bad things to lose the trust. It just kind of was a natural outcome of merging companies that had been our competitors and saw the world through a completely different lens, but I'd certainly done nothing to earn and build and gain their trust. And we realized that there was a high cost to low trust, because we were so internally focused as opposed to focusing on the customer. We were slow in responding. We were all into our own heads about what we're trying to do and who was right and who had what ideas, but we were not customer centric or responsive. Our revenue started to go down and our profit started to go down and we started to become less innovative. And it was, it was not achieving the synergies of what the merger was supposed to do. We finally realized our problem here is not the capabilities and the assets we have collectively. It was that we didn't trust each other and we couldn't collaborate and innovate and we couldn't celebrate our differences without this trust and create something better. So, we, we became very deliberate and intentional. And for me, I was the leader of this group here, I realized, I had to recognize that half the group doesn't trust me and I've got to earn that trust.

**Whitney Johnson:** How did that feel when you realized people didn't trust you?

**Stephen Covey:** It felt awful. And I was very defensive at first, very defensive with, you know, I've done nothing to lose the trust. You know, I always do what I say I'm going to do and these types of things, but then I finally had to just kind of step back and say, "Stephen, don't be defensive. Don't, don't, don't argue for your weakness here. You know, this is the reality that half the group doesn't trust me." Half did, half didn't. And it'd be very easy to just kind of point the finger and say, "Well, it's their fault," you know, and, but no, I had to realize I'd done nothing to earn it. Well, I may be done nothing in my mind to lose it. I'd certainly really did nothing yet to earn it. Once I overcame the kind of the shock of this and the vulnerability of, of, "Gosh, I always prided myself on being a high trust leader. Now, half the group doesn't trust me." Then I took responsibility to say, "OK, I've got to behave my way into greater trust." Words alone won't do it. It's got to be actions, got to be behaviors. And so I met with people and I kind of would take things head on. And I remember going to a conference with our consultants and I remember meeting with them. And I was going to take an hour and go over the strategy.

But I remember getting up in front of the group and say, "Look, my assignment from the coordinating team that put together this conference is to focus on the strategy, and I'm happy to do that. But if you'd like, I'd rather talk about what you'd really probably like to talk about, and my guess is what's on your minds is all the merger issues that have

cropped up. Who's making that decision? Whose compensation system are we're going with? What is the structure going to look like? What are we going to do with these national office versus regional offices versus local offices? Who decides what teams are involved with this? And can we trust any of them? Can we trust you, Stephen?"

I actually verbalized what I knew was on people's minds. So, I tried to, you know, give air to what I knew was out there to make it safe for people to get real, because if I was going to get real, I wanted everyone to get real. I thought if we could get real, we could begin to develop trust. And so I tried to model it and I tried to make it safe. And I took on tough things, including, you know, the kind of the undiscussable issue of, you know, "Stephen, are you competent to be in this job or you just your father's son?"

**Whitney Johnson:** You've verbalized that out loud?

**Stephen Covey:** I verbalized it, because I knew that was on people's minds. And we spent the entire day taking questions, listening. More than anything, I just try to model listening first, demonstrate respect for what I was hearing, talking straight, being transparent. And then we made a series of commitments. I made a series of commitments coming out of this, because some we could answer right there in the moment, others we had to study and work on, take back the teams to consider, but we wrote down several commitments. But I remember getting on a plane, flying back after that meeting and one of the consultants said to me, "Stephen, we built more trust in one day than we have in the prior last year." From that we use that as a springboard to declare our intent that we wanted to build a high-trust team, a high-trust culture to signal our behavior, what we're going to do, what I was going to do to try to earn and gain and grow the trust. And then what was most important, I now had to do what I say I was going to do. I had to behave my way into trust, just like you can behave your way out of trust. And I had to exhibit that and do that. And I hope and I think I, that I did. And we went from low trust to high trust and we began to really run, you know, on seven or eight cylinders instead of on one or two. And it changed everything. And that's where *The Speed of Trust* was born.

**Whitney Johnson:** It sounds like it was one of the hardest experiences of your life to that point in time.

**Stephen Covey:** And I would say maybe still to this day. That was so gut wrenching. It was my idea. Well, the Covey side, along with someone on the Franklin side to come together, to combine and I thought this was a great idea and, and now it looks like it wasn't working. And I felt the responsibility for it, and it is looking like a lot of arrows were pointed at me being part of the problem, and that was, that was gut wrenching. It was very difficult. And it took me a while that to really be able to see it. And then to own it and then do something about it, but I finally came to and I said, "I've got to take this head on," and you know, there's an expression, "If you're going to bow, bow low." And I had to, I had to kind of really go low and say, "I, I need to listen and I need to learn."

**Whitney Johnson:** Now, you know, what's interesting when I hear that is that out of that crucible, I mean, it really is your crucible experience, because out of that has come, in many respects, your life's work.

**Stephen Covey:** I feel that. And I feel like I came out of that far more informed, far more clear and far more inspired of what I wanted to focus on and why. Trust is learnable. It's a skill, is a competency. It's not something that you either just have or you don't. That's your starting point. But you can build trust on purpose and you can move the needle on this. You can get good at this as a leader. And that's where *Speed of Trust* was born, because this was the single most impactful thing I did as a leader and we did as a company.

**Whitney Johnson:** So people don't trust you. You go into that meeting, you say, "Here's what we're going to talk about today." Do you remember how you came to know what you needed to do?

**Stephen Covey:** I do. I was flying to that meeting. I was taking a red eye. I mean, we're just working around the clock. I was taking a red eye, so I just slept in a little bit on the plane. But I remember on the plane, I was preparing my presentation on strategy. And I remember thinking, "Why am I going to talk about this? No one really cares. This is going to be pablum. This is not on people's minds. People want to talk about these merger issues. About how we're going to integrate these two businesses. How we're going to, which structure is going to win out? Which compensation system is going to win out? Which philosophy? Which approach? There's so many of these issues,

I'll come out of this meeting and I'll be no different place than before. Maybe someone has a little bit greater confidence that I am a good strategic thinker, but they're not even going to hear that right now."

And I remember saying to myself, "What do I have to lose by being just real, authentic, open and let them see into my world the same things I'm seeing so they see I don't have a hidden agenda. Let them see what I'm seeing so they can see the things I'm trying to balance and, you know, I made the point that the height of subjectivity is to think that your objective. I said, "That is true. The height of objectivity is to know that your subjective and to take steps to compensate for it." So I said, look, "I know I'm subjective. I'm coming from the Covey Leadership Center. That's my bias. So I'm trying to take steps to compensate for that by making decisions, by involving players that come from a different perspective and having the decision making process be a mutual and involvement process to compensate for my bias." I shared things like that with them because I know I'm biased naturally because of my experience. But yes, it came to me on the plane. "What do I have to lose? Because right now, this is not working right, and we're not we are not succeeding."

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, so good. In your book, you talk about five different waves of trust. There is the self-trust, relationship trust, organizational trust, market trust and societal trust. We don't have time to go through all of them. So what I'd like to do is focus on the self-trust because our work is really focused on the individual and how do you drive organizational change through the individual. So will you just talk to us briefly about the pillars of self-trust?

**Stephen Covey:** Yeah. Yeah. And what I'll say is the idea of those five waves of trust that you just mentioned. My main point is that high-trust teams, high-trust cultures are created from the inside out, meaning we look in the mirror, we start with our self. So self-trust will always precede relationship trust, which precedes team and organizational trust, which precedes market and customer trust, which precedes societal trust. So it all starts with self-trust.

**Whitney Johnson:** With, OK, I'm high-fiving you right now.

**Stephen Covey:** Absolutely. I am too, because it's got to be inside out. You develop, you change, you transform, inside out. Trust, likewise, is an inside out process, starting with ourselves. So self-trust, "Do I trust myself and do I give to my team, to my partners, a leader, a partner, a teammate who they can trust? Is a smart to trust me?" If you start with this, then your ability to build that trust at every other level or wave goes up dramatically. But if you don't have that self-trust or it's diminished or diluted, then you'll have a hard time really building high-trust teams, high-trust cultures. It's got to be inside out. Even if you think it's other people that are the problem. Still the best way is inside out. I talk about how self-trust is all about credibility and I describe four cores of credibility. And before I go in the four cores, there's kind of two key parts of it character and competence. Character and competence. You need both to sustain trust and two of the cores of credibility come from character and two from competence. I use the metaphor of a tree. We have the roots, the trunk and the branches and the fruits of the tree. To the first core of credibility is the roots. That's integrity, honesty, truthfulness, being congruent, being authentic, doing the right thing. It takes humility and courage to have integrity because it's easy to do the right thing when there's no cost or consequence.

The test of integrity is when there's a cost or consequence. That's the root, integrity. The trunk of the tree is intent as the second core of credibility. That's your motive and your agenda. The motive that best builds credibility and trust is caring. The agenda, the best builds credibility and trust is seeking mutual benefit. That's a win-win, where versus being self-serving. So integrity and intent, so heavily out of your character. The next two cores of credibility flow from your competence. So this is the upper half of the tree. The branches and the fruits in the third core is capabilities. And that's your talents, your skills, your expertise, your knowledge. The key question here, are you relevant? Are we learning, growing, improving, getting better, staying relevant? This is a big part of your work, Whitney, with with what you're doing with change, growth through disruption, all the work, Disrupt Yourself, all the things to stay relevant in a changing world. You know, those branches, those capabilities produce the fruits, which is the fourth core. That's our results, our performance, our current performance, our past performance. Why does that matter? Because people project upon us future performance based upon what they've seen. When they see a track record of results, it gives them confidence or trust. Without that, there'll be a gap in that confidence.

So I call these the four cores of credibility, which is really self-trust, integrity and intent, born from your character, capabilities and results, building from your competence. And if we really focus on increasing, improving each of these four cores of credibility will increase in self-trust, will become more credible. You'll be smart for others to trust us, and that will give us more permission, more clout and more courage to lead in ways that inspire trust with others and to take on tough issues. And those four cores of credibility is just a useful construct, a framework, a language and a process to kind of assess, because it's one thing if there's maybe lower self-trust, because there's a gap in integrity, what if there's lower self-trust because there's a gap in capabilities. "We're not current, we're not relevant or lower self-trust because we haven't really delivered or performed or come through and have a track record of results. Or maybe our intent is too self-serving and not oriented around helping and serving and letting other people's lives." This helps you diagnose where you're at. So you can assess what to work on and most importantly, know what to work on of how you can build trust better and faster with people by first building it with yourself by becoming more credible, more trustworthy, if you will.

**Whitney Johnson:** Ok, so I'm going to give you an example of something that I learned when I had a conversation with your coauthor on your second book, Greg Lync, about self-trust. And then I want to hear I'm going to give you a chance to think for a second is some suggestions you have for people in order to build their self-trust. Just simple, simple suggestions.

So here's what happened for me. I remember thinking to myself, "I'm a trustworthy person." This probably happens a lot, doesn't it? You're talking like, "I'm trustworthy." And then you start going through this definitionally and they're like, "Oh, maybe I'm not as trustworthy as I thought it was." So here's what happened to me. I realized, "Oh, you know what? I tell people I'm going to go to a meeting or I'm going to go have dinner or I'm going to have lunch. And then I cancel a lot at the last minute because I've got too much work to do." There's just too much going on. And I realized that when I was canceling, that meant that not only could people not trust me. I couldn't trust myself because I wasn't keeping my word, and so ever since then, which has probably been about seven or eight years ago now, I have tried very hard to not set up a meeting or not make a commitment that I can't keep so that I could trust myself more. So that's like a practical thing I did. And I don't know if you found a lot of people have done that kind of thing, but I'd love to hear other suggestions

**Stephen Covey:** I think is a brilliant, practical thing to do, not only for yourself, but it'll work for everyone, because it's interesting that you would highlight making and keeping commitments. The research shows, but I get into the behavior half of how you build trust through credibility and through behavior. Of all the behaviors, the number one behavior, according to the research, that builds trust with other people is to make another person a commitment and to keep it. Make another commitment and keep it. And repeat that process, especially if it's a value added commitment. It becomes a virtuous upward spiral. So you're doing that with others and you realize that if you make these commitments and don't keep it cancel that you are losing trust with them. It's interesting. You also recognized you're losing trust with yourself, because you're exactly right. That's also the fastest way to lose trust with yourself or to gain it is around making and keeping commitments to yourself or not. So I would say that you've identified the right thing. And I've learned, in fact, when someone is lacking in self-trust, self-confidence, I'll usually go right to the this and I won't focus on making a keeping commitment with others. I'll focus on making and keeping commitments to yourself. And I never forget one time I was doing a session on *Speed of Trust* and we had a break and I just taught the five waves of trust, you know, that inside out process.

And someone comes up to me at the break and says, "Hey, Stephen, this is really helpful when you show those big waves of trust, that ripple effect with self-trust in the middle, I realized what my problem is." Then he kind of looked around to make sure no one's looking. He said, "Hey, I'm not happy with my life. I'm not where I thought I'd be in my career. And my family life is not very good. I don't have very many friends. And I realized what my problem is now. You know, my very first job I came in, can't trust my boss. I get a different boss, can't trust this boss. So I go to a different company, can't trust my bosses there either can't trust this boss going to keep bouncing around. I go home and my community, can't trust my neighbors. Can't trust anyone in the community, because I don't even trust my spouse or my kids. When you put up the five waves of trust, I realize what my problem is."

And then he very carefully made sure no one is looking any kind of whispered in my ear. And he said, "I don't trust myself. I don't trust myself. So where do I start? What do I do?"

My answer was what you pinpointed. I said, "Start by making and keeping commitments to yourself and start with the little things. So, if you set your alarm to get up in the morning to go exercise, make the commitment the night before, if you're going to do the exercise or you value the sleep more. If you value the sleep more than set your alarm later. If you're going to get up to exercise, then go exercise when you said it or else don't set it at that time and start with these little things. Make small commitments you can make to yourself and then keep them and learn to treat a commitment you make yourself with the same respect as you would with somebody else and you'll begin to grow in clarity and integrity and empower in the small things and making and keeping commitments to yourself. And those small things become big things."

And so is a really practical step of building self-trust. I'll give you just one more that will help build trust as you work with other people. The self-trust is really heavy on the integrity and making keeping commitments to yourself. That's integrity. Here's one on intent get really good at declaring your intent.

**Stephen Covey:** That means you share not only what you're doing, but why you're doing your open, your transparent. You don't have a hidden agenda, you have an open agenda. It's what I tried to do in that meeting with the consultants. I tried to open my agenda, be transparent, even be vulnerable. The very act of doing that invites reciprocity and it creates trust, because if people realize I'm authentic, I'm real, I'm not putting on airs. I'm not trying to be someone who I'm not. When you don't declare your intent, what do people do anyways? When you don't declare it? People ascribe intent to you on their own and they'll do it at best they'll be guessing at worst. They'll do it from their worst case fears or worst case scenarios. And our rule is no guessing. If people guess your agenda or ascribe intent to you, tell them. Declare your intent. "Here's who I am. Here's what I'm all about. Here's what matters to me." That way you take the mystery out of the relationship with somebody and you go first, leaders go first. If you do that up front, it gives people a new lens through which they will view your subsequent behavior. When you don't do it, they bring their own lens to it.

**Whitney Johnson:** I love it.

In our work, we have developed a framework called the S Curve of Learning™, which you probably are familiar with, E.M. Rogers work on the S curve, diffusion of innovations. And then we used it with my late mentor, Clayton Christensen, in our investing to help us figure out how quickly an innovation would be adopted. Well, one of the big "ahas" or insights that I had when we were investing is that we could use the S curve to help us understand how we learn and how we grow. And so whenever you start something new, like you're going in front of a lot of people being very transparent for the first time, you are at the launch point of that S curve. And so it's going to feel scary and you're going to feel like growth is slow, but then you practice it and you get into the groove and so you move into the sweet spot of the S where the growth is very fast. You're feeling increasingly competent and confident, and then you get to the top of that S curve and not with trust, but with jobs and roles, you can say, "I kind of figured this out and I really love this, but now I'm feeling a little bit bored. So it's time for me to do something new."

And so what I'd like to do is for, we have a lot of managers who are, who listen to this podcast and just ask you a couple of questions. When you have a person who's new on your team. They are at the launch point of that S, what can of manager do so that the person feels like it's safe for them to actually learn and not have to perform?

**Stephen Covey:** Yeah. Well, first of all, I love the framing of that question, which is how can you make it safe for them so that they can learn in that S curve. They're in the front end of it. So I think some of the behaviors I talk about in the *Speed of Trust* can be really useful to build that kind of climate where it's safe to learn and even safe to fail as long as we learn from it, try to get better. And so if upfront you could focus on a couple of key behaviors. One will be clarifying expectations of what we're trying to do and so that we're on the same page as to, you know, we're trying to get this job done in a certain way or with a certain outcome, a certain result, and always focus on results more than methods so that you can really empower people to take responsibility for results. The moment you supervise their methods, then you're responsible. If you give them results, then they can take that on. So you really are clarifying expectations and you also agree upon to a process of accountability. And in the process, you're also very much transparent and straight talking about it, including that in the expectations and accountability that, that perhaps it's safe to, to fail, to take a risk. And to, "I'm trusting you to use your good judgment." Now, look, if there's some no no's or some watch outs or some guardrails, make sure you put those into because you're not setting anyone up to fail. I just think of my dad and green and clean as a young boy, you know, he just, just kind of taught

me the expectations "green and clean" and the accountability, which is once a week, we'll walk around. In some ways it's that simple and yet that difficult to we try to kind of clarify expectations, agree upon a process of accountability.

If you do that well up front, then what you've done is you've built an agreement, an understanding and then the agreement governs. And with that, you can intentionally and deliberately extend trust to your colleague to your direct report to your partner there that's in that learning curve that's on the front end of the S curve of Learning™.

And you're showing them, "I trust you even knowing you're not perfect. And know you're, you're in their early learning stage and you're going to make some mistakes. You're going to fail. You're going to fall down. And I still trust you. And because we're clear on what we're trying to do here and we're trying to do is always around the outcome, but also the process and the relationship. And we're trying to build this."

And so your ability to extend trust goes up when you have clear expectations and an agreed upon process of accountability that you've created together, then you can extend it more abundantly and when people feel trusted, they respond to it. They rise to the occasion. They perform better. They'll go through the S curve fast and better because they feel trusted. They have a tailwind behind their back. They have your confidence, your support, and they'll do it better. And yet you still keep some element of control, if you will, because you've created an agreement together on what we're trying to do and how to be accountable against it. So it becomes an iterative cycle, but I really believe it can accelerate the learning and make it safer to learn, make it safer to fail, make it safer to grow from the failure and to go down that path, but you kind of up front create that agreement.

**Whitney Johnson:** So soon as you said that, I thought the tailwind of trust, right? Just flew up that S curve.

OK, so now you've got a person in the sweet spot and there really are they're accelerating. They're competent, they're confident. Is there any, do you have any thoughts on everything's working for them at this point, it's easy to just sort of let them be and even ignore them. Do you have any suggestions for how do you continue to maintain that trust when you might be able to ignore them?

**Stephen Covey:** When people are in a sweet spot, doing pretty well, if you can broaden the, the mind set from "I" to "we" and make it more collaborative so that you see them now as a chance. You're a model, but if you could also become a mentor. A mentor is a model with a relationship. You're in the sweet spot. Now, that doesn't mean you're a mastery yet, but you're trying to say, "Not only am I getting better and better at this, ultimately work gets done with and through people. And so it's not just me doing this independently. It's we doing this interdependently, or it's even me doing this in an interdependent reality on a team, in a relationship, in a culture. And we learn how to collaborate. We learn how to synergize, and we learn how to create collectively that we can do better as a team than we could individually." So that true collaboration, coal labor versus just merely coordinating doesn't require any trust to coordinate, requires a lot of trust to truly collaborate. So, I would just say try to broaden it. And it's not that you don't continue in the sweet spot of improving yourself, but independence is not the highest value. Interdependence is a higher value than independence. But interdependence is a choice that only independent people can make. So you're trying to move along that S curve. And I'm just saying broaden the curve to become collaborative and interdependent, not just independent. That would be a great source of more growth and learning as you move along the S curve.

**Whitney Johnson:** Ok, so I'm going to go to mastery just a minute, but before I do that, I just there's a question that's on my mind, which is, have you found that there is a question that you can ask a person when you're hiring to determine if they are worthy of your trust? And is there a question that you can ask a prospective boss to determine if they are worthy of your trust?

**Stephen Covey:** Yeah. Now, this is a great question. I think there's a number of ways we can try to do behavioral type style interviewing where you try to have them identify situations and how they saw it, how they acted through it. Here's one I found has been helpful for me, is the kind of phrase something like this and it can work on either side, either when I'm hiring or even considering with a boss. And I can just say something to this effect of, "Could you describe a situation where you did what you believed was the right thing to do, even though there was a cost and a consequence to doing so?" It's relatively easy to do the right thing when it doesn't cost anything. The test of integrity is when there's a cost or a consequence. Maybe it was overt where they're being kind of pushed and it looked like all



the momentum was around, kind of taking this for the team, doing the right thing, but maybe we're violating our values. And, and so the test of integrity is, you know, do we have the courage? Do we have the credibility? Do we have the self-trust that we stand up and say, "This is against who I am or this is against who we are"?

And I had the courage to demonstrate that in the moment of truth. And you can even flip it around with a boss just to try to get a sense of, "Tell us about the culture and have you seen examples of where people live by our values in spite of how there was a cost or a consequence to doing so?" And you can see a lot the mindset of the, the boss, the leader of how they treat that, and they view that as heroic. "Even though we lost the business, we're only going to do business with people that we can trust. And that was worth it to us." It tells you a lot about a person by how they respond to that type of challenge and opportunity. It brings me to this simple definition. The difference between honesty and integrity. See honesty is when our words match our reality. Integrity is when our reality matches our words. We are who we say we are. We're authentic.

**Whitney Johnson:** I got to think about. That, that's really good.

So mastery, you've got a person at the top of the S curve. How do you make it safe for them to come to you and say, "You know what, I'm bored. I need to do something new?" How do you make that possible?

**Stephen Covey:** I believe he make it safe by again, you're back to extending trust and it's easier to trust someone and mastery, right? Because there you can do it quite abundantly, but being trusting is as vital to trust as being trustworthy. Got to have both. Got to have that credibility, the trustworthiness. They also have to be trusting. And leaders that are trusting inspire people and bring out the best in them. And so with people that are in self-mastery, you can be extremely trusting of them. And they see it, they feel it by how you involve them, by how you interact with them, by how you give decisions and responsibility to them so that they feel like, "I am empowered, this is my decision, and to be trusted as the most inspiring form of human motivation, it brings out the very best in everybody." And so you can be really abundant and how much trust that you give them. But I'm going to add one more piece to it. As a leader, try to also focus on inspiring others. And I believe that we've too often equated inspiration with charisma. They're not the same. I know a lot of people who are charismatic, who are not inspiring at all. And in the converse is true. That a lot of people are not necessarily charismatic, but who are extremely inspiring.

And Jim Collins language, there's a level five leader. They're not necessarily charismatic, but they are inspiring. And you inspire when you connect with people and when you connect to purpose. As I learned that people that are into self-mastery, they're already into success, inspire them towards significance, towards mattering, towards creating value, creating something bigger than themselves. You're trying to embed and imbue meaning, purpose and contribution into what they're doing and into what you're doing. You focus on the relationship of caring. You focus at the team level by building a sense of belonging, but focus at the work level by embedding purpose, meaning and contribution into the nature of the work itself. So, they go from success to significance and they come to recognize that life is about contribution, not accumulation. You're inspiring the best whole person, body, heart, mind, spirit and maybe they're at self-mastery on three of those four areas, but what if you could really tap into the greatest value to make a difference in the world? To matter, to leave a legacy? I think that's what people in self-mastery are wanting is something bigger than themselves. And I believe inspiration is the new engagement. If there's a whole new frontier of possibilities as we do that as leaders and everyone can inspire.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, that was stirring. I love that so much. OK, so now that everybody is is feeling inspired, where can people find you? And I know that you're writing a new book, so I don't know if you want to share anything about that, but how do people engage with you?

**Stephen Covey:** You can go to our website, [speedoftrust.com](http://speedoftrust.com), and there there's a variety of tools, video things you can use and find useful to you. And also there's information of how to get in touch with our team, with me. Contact me. I'm on LinkedIn. I'm on Twitter, @stephenmrcovey. I do work with senior and executive leadership teams and management teams all around the world, some 55 countries now that I personally presented in and love doing it. I love helping to build high trust teams, high trust cultures. And I do have a book coming out. It'll be out at the start of next year, 2022. And it's called *Trust and Inspire*. And it's all about this you know how the world has changed, but our style leadership is not. We're still too much trapped in the old style of command and control. We've just become better at it, more benevolent, more sophisticated, even more enlightened, but our paradigm hasn't shifted.

We need a new way to lead in the new world and in juxtaposition to command and control and content, trust and inspire. And this is about how you can become a trust and aspire leader in any industry, in any sector, in any relationship and as a person and especially needed in a low-trust world. So I'm excited about that. And I'm really grateful for this chance to, to be with you, Whitney, and, and admire you, admire your work. This podcast and the things that you're doing and how you're inspiring leaders in organizations everywhere with the tremendous contributions you're making. So, thank you for this opportunity to be with you.

**Whitney Johnson:** So happy to have you.

OK, so Stephen, my final question for you. When I'm coaching, I always ask this is what was most useful for you? Because I've been asking you lots and lots of questions. But as you've been talking and thinking and processing, there's probably some idea or something that you thought, "Oh, I need to I need to act on that or I need to do something with that." What was useful for you?

**Stephen Covey:** Applying the S curve of Learning™ and thinking it from a trust perspective and because, you know, this S curve of Learning™ and seeing where people are at, but trying to say, "OK, what if I can take people in those three different stages and try to embed trust principles to it? So in that first stage, I'm extending trust with a clear expectations and accountability and let the power of trust ignite that even further, faster. And then when I'm in that, that sweet spot stage, I'm adding the idea of, of collaborating and interdependence in this process. And that requires trust. You can't collaborate with people you don't trust. And finally, as I move into self-mastery, making sure that I'm now moving also towards inspiration. We overcome the boredom because it's not about me, it's about contribution and making a difference and mattering and leaving a legacy and significance. And so taking your S curve of Learning™ and which is so useful to learn in a growth mindset, all those things and adding the trust overlay to it, I'm excited about going deeper and further with this.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, so fun. The tailwind of trust

**Stephen Covey:** The tailwind of trust.

**Whitney Johnson:** Stephen M.R. Covey, thank you so much for joining us today.

**Stephen Covey:** Thank you so much, Whitney. It's been an honor and a delight to be with you. Thoroughly enjoyed it. Thank you.

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What an important topic. Four takeaways.

Number one. if you haven't already listened to my interview with Ed Catmull in Episode 210, you will want to do that. He talked about the importance of and how to extend trust to his employees, just like Stephen's father did with him. There are so much power in being trusted.

Two. So you extend trust to me, but am I trustworthy? Do I have the character? Will I do the right thing even if there's a cost and have I declared my intent so people know my motives? Then there's competence. Can I do what I say I'll do? Do I have a track record? If we have character plus competence, then we will be trustworthy. While preparing for the interview, I came across this quote from Tom Peters, he was our guest in Episode 53 and he said, "Ask yourself mercilessly, do I exude trust e-x-u-d-e. Big word. Do I smack of trust?" "Think about it carefully," he says.

Third. After talking to Stephen, I'm going to modify my questions on hiring. You may remember you can download these at [whitneyjohnson.com/hiring](http://whitneyjohnson.com/hiring). I want to now include this question... Could you describe a situation where you did what you believe was the right thing to do, even though there was a cost and a consequence of doing so? The

test of integrity is, does a person have the courage to say this is against who I am or who we are in a moment of truth?

Number four. What am I going to do to trust myself more. I'll include in the show notes the article about canceling meetings, but I think there's something simpler, something more basic, like when I say I'm going to stop working in ten minutes, do I keep my word? Most of the time I don't. Negatory. This is an easy way to flex, to build this muscle when I say I'm going to stop working in 10 minutes, I stop. Eric Orton, who I wrote about in our piece, Is it time to jump to a vacation S curve? Which you can download [whitneyjohnson.com/vacation](http://whitneyjohnson.com/vacation), but I digress. He said this, "The size of your dreams is in proportion to how much you trust yourself." Let me say that again. "The size of your dreams is in proportion to how much you trust yourself." What are you going to do to be more trustworthy? What are you going to do to trust yourself more?

Thank you again to Stephen M.R. Covey for being our guest. Thank you to you for entrusting me for just a few minutes with your mind and your heart. Thank you for listening. Thank you to our team, Emily Cottrell, Whitney Jobe, Steve Ludwig and Melissa Rutty.

I'm Whitney Johnson.  
And this is Disrupt Yourself.